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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. Bruce
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Memorandum of Conversation

DATE:

SECRET SECURITY INFORMATION — October 29, 1952

SUBJECT: SAS Application To Secure Commercial Air Rights from Scandinavia to West Coast U.S. via Thule, Greenland.

PARTICIPANTS: U - Mr. Bruce
Mr. Thomas Finletter, Secretary of the Air Force
Lt. Gen. Thomas D. White, Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations

COPIES TO: Mr. Paul Barringer, TRC
Mr. A. G. Ronhovde, BNA

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Amembassies, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Reykjavik

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I asked Mr. Finletter to open the discussion. He called upon General White to present the views of the Air Staff. General White said he, of course, appreciated the logic of developing the polar great circle route which in this case made Thule a natural transit point. He then outlined the security problems that would arise from commercial operations by SAS and possibly other airlines through the Thule base. These problems involved, he said, an increased air defense problem, with the possibilities opened for a sudden strike by hostile aircraft coming in behind a commercial plane or in place of such plane after having knocked it down. He referred also to the sabotage possibilities, and to the security problems arising from the presence of civilians either in transit or stationed at the field. Beyond these problems there were others that should be mentioned, such as the air-sea rescue responsibilities, establishment of necessary facilities, POL, et cetera.

The above problems were discussed in some detail, with the consensus reached that they were all of concern. Aside from the security problems it was estimated that

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construction of needed facilities would probably cost about $5 million. General White indicated that the Air Force had not been happy with their experience at other bases where commercial operations were carried on.

The discussion then turned to the question of what response might be made to the Scandinavians. It was agreed that the motivation of the proposal was primarily one of prestige rather than commercial profit. As possible responses I suggested that we could say yes or no or possibly we could give "token" rights. General White suggested other possibilities such as permitting flights through BW-1 or BW-8 instead of Thule; limiting flights to perhaps one a month; or agreeing in principle but indicating that security considerations make it not feasible to proceed now but that we will be glad to review the situation at a future date. Mr. Finletter asked whether we could say yes to the Danes for the operation of a purely Danish line, since a principal consideration is the fact that Thule is on Danish territory and we do not wish to jeopardize our position should we later wish to secure additional rights in Greenland. Mr. Finletter expressed his order of preference as: first choice, agreement in principle with review of implementation later; or, second choice, permitting limited flights. We did not see how a straight yes answer could be justified at this time.

After some discussion it was agreed that Mr. Barringer would discuss with the CAB the proposal of agreement in principle now and if the CAB would go along we would call in Ambassador Kaufmann and explore this procedure with him.

During the earlier discussion it had been agreed that the Greenland Agreement of 1951 should be carefully reviewed to determine whether the Danes have reserved rights which would entitle them to use the Thule base for commercial transit.

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